

Nashville District

Human Resources Newsletter

"News You Can Use"

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The purpose of this newsletter is to keep Nashville District employees informed about personnel issues, concerns, and topics. You are encouraged to review the information and disseminate to your organization. If there are particular areas of interest that you would like to see addressed in future issues, an article of general interest, or general comments, please contact John Restey at 615-736-5538 or John.G.Restey@lrm02.usace.army.mil.

General News:

OPM TO LAUNCH REVISED JOB WEB SITE IN SUMMER

By early summer, federal job seekers could find more enticing vacancy announcements on USAJOBS. OPM plans to launch a new, user-friendly version of the site. The new version of USAJOBS, will leave agency recruiters room to insert catchy logos and write concise descriptions of vacancies. Job seekers who are interested in the initial description will then be able to click on tabs to reach pages that describe duties, qualifications and pay levels in more detail. In addition, information that is cumbersome, but required by law, would be available to interested browsers by hyperlink, rather than in the text of the announcement. The redesigned USAJOBS site will be one-tool agencies can use to make job listings more appealing. Rather than focus on pay and areas where government might not be able to compete with the private sector, agencies should emphasize the intangible qualities that make government service attractive to job seekers, including flexible work hours, the chance to influence policy and the family-friendly benefits available to many civil servants. TAKEN FROM GOVEXEC.COM BY Amelia Gruber

NEW RELOCATION PROGRAM FOR DOD EXPECTED

Each year, the Defense Department moves more than 600,000 service members and civilians, and spends approximately \$1.7 billion doing it. But that service has been riddled with complaints from those who use it, and 10 years ago Pentagon officials decided to study ways to change and improve it. Last fall, after several pilot programs and other studies, the U.S. Transportation Command, which oversees relocation services, sent recommendations for a new program to Congress. The resulting "[Families First](http://dailyfed/0902/092402t1.htm)" relocation program is scheduled to start in 2004, and

will focus on increasing communication, reducing damage and loss claims, and expanding the number of direct moves. The program will use a performance-based contract structure, getting feedback from service members to determine the best-performing contractors who, in turn, will get the most Defense business. It also includes higher liability payments for the full replacement value of lost or damaged goods and streamlined claims processing. **TAKEN FROM GOVEXEC.COM By Tanya N. Ballard**

HOUSE COMMITTEE PASSES DOD REFORM BILL

The House Government Reform Committee passed legislation that allows the Department of Defense to completely overhaul its personnel system. In addition to giving the Defense Department wide latitude in establishing a new personnel system, the bill creates a Human Capital Performance Fund for all agencies to use to institute “pay-for-performance” systems. Three amendments effecting DOD were offered to the legislation, all of which passed. They include: (1) bar the Defense Department from exempting itself from the Hatch Act and other ethics rules; (2) allow the Defense Department to waive the Title 5 provisions dealing with performance appraisal systems, position classification, pay rates and pay systems, collective bargaining rights, due process and appeal rights, and premium pay, so that DOD can create a pay-for-performance system; (3) allow the Defense Secretary to write or re-write personnel regulations without the consent of the Office of Personnel Management on matters “essential to national security,” subject to the “decision” of the President, instead of at the “direction” of the President. **TAKEN FROM FEDmanager.com**

NEW TSP SYSTEM ON TRACK, BUT AT A HIGHER COST

A much-delayed computer system that would give federal employees more control over their retirement savings accounts is still on track to debut in mid-June. The new system will allow federal workers to make daily changes to their 401k-style Thrift Savings Plan investments. Currently, such changes can only be made monthly. The 3 million TSP account holders will also be able to look up their account balance updates online each day, change the amount of their monthly payouts after they retire and make a partial withdrawal of money, rather than a full withdrawal, as soon as they retire. **TAKEN FROM GOVEXEC.COM By Brian Friel**

FASCLASS Position Description Clarification

Recently a note was inserted when a user enters FASCLASS to create a position description. The note states "The electronic signature of the individual requesting the personnel action certifies that the duties and responsibilities of the associated position description are accurate and that the position is necessary to carry out government functions for which they are responsible. If you have Delegated Classification Authority, when you use your PIN to authorize (approve) Request for Personnel Action you are certifying that the associated position description has been classified to the appropriate pay plan, title, series and grade."

It is important to note that this is not just an administrative exercise. Department of Army eliminated the use of the DA-374 in 1999 when it implemented FASCLASS. The DA-374 was the form that was signed by the individual with Delegated Classification Authority. When FASCLASS was introduced it was determined that the electronic signature on the RPA served to identify the supervisor who can authorize and certify the accuracy of the position description and who is the manager with Delegated Classification Authority. As you know, only supervisors/managers have the authority to assign duties and responsibilities and the authority to make decisions on when to initiate personnel actions on employees. The name that is entered in the authorization block of an RPA should be the same name that is identified on the FASCLASS position description. If a person without DCA authorizes the RPA or those without DCA are identified on the FASCLASS position description, then those documents would be considered out of compliance with DA's regulatory requirements. The next time you or your customer initiates an RPA and/or creates a position description in FASCLASS, remember those signatures are extremely important and represent decisions that only authorized and trained supervisors are permitted to make.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR OUR CUSTOMERS -- CENTRALIZATION OF CIVILIAN DATABASES

The Army infrastructure that supports the Defense Civilian Personnel Data System (DCPDS) is undergoing a major transformation during the next month. At close of business (COB) June 06, 2003, we will begin to consolidate *ALL* CPOC databases (CONUS and OCONUS) into a single, centralized DCPDS database at the Army Civilian Data Center. To support this effort and to assure continuity of service we have asked all users of DCPDS to sequence their personnel action requests so that they can be scheduled and accomplished in an orderly manner.

The system will be made available to CPOCs beginning June 25 for testing and resumption of personnel action processing, and to all others on 30 June. We are striving to keep the impact of this change to a minimum. We have coordinated our plan with the Defense Finance and Accounting Service and issued specific guidance on proper sequencing of personnel requests so we do not anticipate pay related problems. Throughout this timeframe, the personnel offices will continue to aggressively work non-DCPDS functions such as classifying jobs, rating and ranking applications, and processing referral lists.

Following the centralization of the Army regional DCPDS databases, the Army (along with all DoD components) will begin the migration of DCPDS from a client-server to a web-based environment. The transition to the web-based version of DCPDS, Oracle 11i, is scheduled to commence on July 18, 2003. With the upgrade to Oracle 11i, users will access the DCPDS application via a standard web browser, taking advantage of Internet technology and improved system navigation. We do not anticipate a lengthy system downtime and will keep you apprised of the details as time approaches.

FULLY AUTOMATED SYSTEM FOR CLASSIFICATION (FASCLASS) 2.0 SCREENCAMS

The CPOCMA has created and published two new ScreenCam movies (computer screen recordings with voice narration) about the FASCLASS version 2.0. They are on the "How-To Movies" page of the CPOCMA website (<http://www.cpocma.army.mil/howtomovies>). One is an introduction to FASCLASS 2.0 which shows how to locate FASCLASS on the Internet and search for a position description (PD) and is intended primarily for new FASCLASS users or those wanting a refresher. The other shows how to use the Restricted Access mode in FASCLASS 2.0 to create a new PD and is intended for FASCLASS users interested in the restricted mode or creating a PD.

Health And Benefits:

FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNT (FSA) DELAYED

The Federal Flexible Benefits Plan ("FedFlex") has experienced another delay. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) announced on May 19, (the first day of the planned early enrollment opportunity period), that the program administrator, SHPS, cannot take enrollments at this time. OPM has halted enrollments while they review agency options regarding administrative fees in response to anticipated Congressional action. Following the review, OPM will announce when FSA enrollments will be accepted. OPM has not responded to questions regarding the possibility of a new early enrollment period. DoD employees had previously been notified that the Defense Finance and Accounting Service would not be ready to deduct contributions from earnings for FSA accounts until September, thus delaying participation in the program. OPM has asked that employees continue to be encouraged to visit the FSA web site <http://www.fsafeds.com/> or to call the toll free number 1-877-FSAFEDS(372-3337) to speak with a SHPS benefits counselor. The TDD number is 800-952-0450. Information will be provided regarding enrollment opportunities as it becomes available

Latest TSP Information:

- * Open Season Dates: April 15 through June 30
October 15 through December 31
- * TSP Contribution Limit: FERS - 13% (up to the IRS Limit of \$12,000)
CSRS - 8% (up to the IRS Limit of \$12,000)

* TSP Contribution Limit for members of the uniformed services for 2003: 8% (up to the IRS limit)

* Loan Interest Rate: For new loans - 4.000%

* Loan agreements and withdrawal requests - must be approved by May 30 for payment in June

* Annuity interest rate index: 3.875% for annuities purchased on June 2003 and 3.875% for annuities purchased in May 2003.

* Interfund transfer requests - made on the TSP Website or the Thriftline by midnight (CST) on the 15th of the month will be effective as of the end of the month. Paper-based requests must be made on Form TSP-50 (civilians) or Form TSP-U-50 (members of the uniformed services) and must be received by the TSP Service Office by the 15th of the month to be effective as of the end of the month.

* Your current account balance is available after the monthly processing cycle, once earnings have been allocated to participants' accounts. The previous month's balance (and rates of return) are generally available on the 4th business day of the month. You will need your Social Security number and Personal Identification Number (PIN). If you do not know your PIN, you can request a new one from the Account Access section of the website, www.tsp.gov or from the Thriftline (800) 245-8777.

* Civilian TSP participants who are members of the Ready Reserve - If you are a civilian TSP participant with an outstanding TSP loan and are placed in nonpay status to perform military service, make sure your agency provides the TSP with documentation to certify your status and suspend loan payments. The IRS code allows the TSP to suspend loan payments for all participants placed in a nonpay status for up to one year of nonpay. However, participants placed in nonpay status to perform military service for more than one year are authorized suspension of loan payments for the entire period of military service. For more information, see the Fact Sheet, "Effect of Nonpay Status on TSP Participation".

Food For Thought:

**Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take,
but by the moments that take our breath away.**

